

All legal services programs have financial eligibility criteria for clients. Generally families must earn less than 125% of the federal poverty level (about \$25,000 for a family of four). One person in five in New Mexico, 411,000 people, meets this criterion.

Approximately 25% of civil legal aid clients are Native American and 50% are Hispanic. Many clients are single mothers.

This appropriation will go to the Civil Legal Services Commission, established by the Legislature, to distribute funds to non-profit civil legal service providers. The Commission grants funds, oversees their use, and operates with strict accountability.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

The Administrative Office of the Courts notes that, providing greater assistance to low-income persons with civil legal disputes may help the courts function more efficiently and hasten the resolution of cases. Currently, many low-income New Mexicans with civil legal matters try to navigate the legal system by representing themselves. Self-represented litigants commonly slow the legal process, file the wrong documents, do not provide the correct supporting material, and do not understand the legal process. Court hearings with self-represented litigants take longer and additional hearings are commonly needed. In Albuquerque, over half of all persons in family law matters represent themselves. That is consistent throughout the state.

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